

Washington Post backs Republican-led witch-hunt against scientists

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On Thursday, the *Washington Post* published an editorial renewing its promotion of the Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, presenting an absurd, semi-literate attack on the research of scientists Michael Worobey and Kristian Andersen.

The *Post* editorial appears as the new Republican majority in the House of Representatives prepares a series of witch-hunting investigations seeking to scapegoat scientists for the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the discredited Wuhan lab conspiracy theory, China's Wuhan Institute of Virology, with the collaboration of the National Institutes of Health under Anthony Fauci and the EcoHealth Alliance under Peter Daszak, created COVID-19 and then released it, deliberately or accidentally, into the city of Wuhan, China.

In a series of papers published between December 2021 and March 2022, Worobey, Andersen and their collaborators demolished the conspiracy theory, establishing a direct connection between the location of the earliest COVID-19 cases and the Wuhan Wet Market, showing that the market was the epicenter of the disease and documenting the route by means of which COVID-19 spread from wildlife to humans.

At least for a time, the research by Worobey and Andersen stopped the mouths of those within the political "mainstream" who sought to promote the conspiracy theory, which was concocted and promoted by the American fascist Steve Bannon.

In a campaign led by editorial page writer Josh Rogin and with close collaboration from within the Trump administration, the *Washington Post* had sought to bring the theory to the "mainstream," to promote anti-Chinese xenophobia and anti-scientific bigotry, with the simultaneous aim of undermining a scientific response to the pandemic and propagandizing for war with China.

But since the publication of Worobey's research, the US political establishment became much more cautious about embracing a pseudo-scientific conspiracy theory that had been completely demolished by leading virologists.

The political winds changed with the midterm election,

which, despite demonstrating that there was no widespread support for the fascist-led Republican Party, led to a narrow Republican majority in the House of Representatives.

The Republican Party, which officially defines the January 6 fascist coup attempt as "legitimate political discourse," has in store a stacked agenda of witch-hunting inquisitions, led by a pack of fascists like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Lauren Boebert.

High on the list is a series of hearings aiming to promote the lie that scientists, including Fauci and Daszak, created COVID-19.

"We need all of Fauci's emails and communications surrounding the origin of COVID-19, the NIH's documents on experiments at the Wuhan Institute of Virology as well as EcoHealth Alliance's involvement," wrote Representative James Comer, a co-conspirator in the January 6 coup attempt. He added, "These will establish what Fauci knew and when he knew it.

"The American people deserve accountability, and Republicans are determined to provide it when we take back the House of Representatives in 2023."

Now that the Republicans have retaken the House of Representatives, sections of the US political establishment are seeking to give credence to the Republican-led witch-hunt against scientists and revive the Wuhan lab lie.

The opening shot was fired by the *Post*, which published its editorial Thursday under the headline, "Wuhan's early covid cases are a mystery. What is China hiding?"

The verbose, plodding, 3,000-word editorial, makes precisely one argument. It attempts to demonstrate that the cases analyzed by Worobey and Andersen are a subset of the cases that actually occurred, and thus *may* present a skewed picture of where the epicenter was actually located.

A serious attempt to refute the argument of the two scientists would have consisted of claiming that the additional cases somehow moved the epicenter of the outbreak.

But the editorial does no such thing. It merely claims that since the sample of cases studied by Worobey and Andersen

is, in fact, a sample rather than the entire universe of all COVID-19 cases from Wuhan, it *might* present a distorted view of where the cases were centered.

Any attempt to follow this line of argumentation would destroy the entire field of statistical inference, which serves as the basis of vast portions of modern science. By this logic, no scientific paper based on statistical analysis would be valid, because they universally draw on samples of populations, not a count of the entire population itself.

Ridiculing another version of this argument, Anderson referenced John Snow's tracking of the 1854 cholera epidemic to a water pump in Soho, London, writing on Twitter:

In other news, it wasn't actually the water pump—it was the cobblestone five centimeters South-West that was responsible for the cholera outbreak. Why? Because the pump wasn't **exactly** in the middle of the centroid. So definitely the cobblestone.

The level of innumeracy expressed in the editorial is entirely in the domain of the fascist barbarians, like Taylor Greene with her “Jewish space laser” conspiracy theory, that the *Post* is appealing to.

Responding to the *Post*'s editorial, Andersen wrote, “Whenever I read an Editorial from @washingtonpost on SARS2 origins, I'm astounded by the ignorance and incompetence.”

Scientist Peter Hotez said that the *Post* editorial “missed the mark,” adding that they “made the mistake of giving equal weight to lab leak conspiracies when there is zero scientific evidence for this and lots of scientific evidence against it.”

In a portrait of the political motivations of the *Post* in resurrecting the discredited conspiracy theory, Hotez wrote:

This seems to be a new trend, liberal leaning news outlets worried they went too far to the left, rather than just invite reasonable counterparts, compensate by giving a voice to the whack-a-doodle. This is not helpful, particularly when the House Freedom Caucus has announced their plans in 2023 to use the [Republican] majority to attack American science and scientists. The biomedical science community will need help, not this stuff.

He added, “Again, right now while our Govt leaders

entertain baseless conspiracies coronaviruses are jumping every day from bats to people, or through a mammalian intermediate host. On average every 7-10 years one catches fire or gains critical mass. Epidemic/pandemic #4 will emerge soon.”

The *Post* and the US political establishment it speaks for are deaf to such appeals. With the aim of attempting to cultivate a popular constituency for conflict with China and disparaging a science-based response to the pandemic, they are deliberately promoting anti-scientific misinformation and conspiracy theories.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in October 2021:

The Wuhan lab lie is motivated not by science but geopolitics. As the United States, Australia and the UK move to provoke a military showdown with China over Taiwan, the purpose of this torrent of lies is to demonize China and the Chinese people and to scapegoat them for a disease that has killed over one million Americans, according to IHME projections.

The *Post*, which falsely claims that China is responsible for a deadly pandemic that has killed one million Americans, is also openly advocating that the United States prepare to fight a war with China.

The aim of the *Post* is to corrupt public opinion, to make the people hate, through the promotion of a lie that can be used to justify a war.



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